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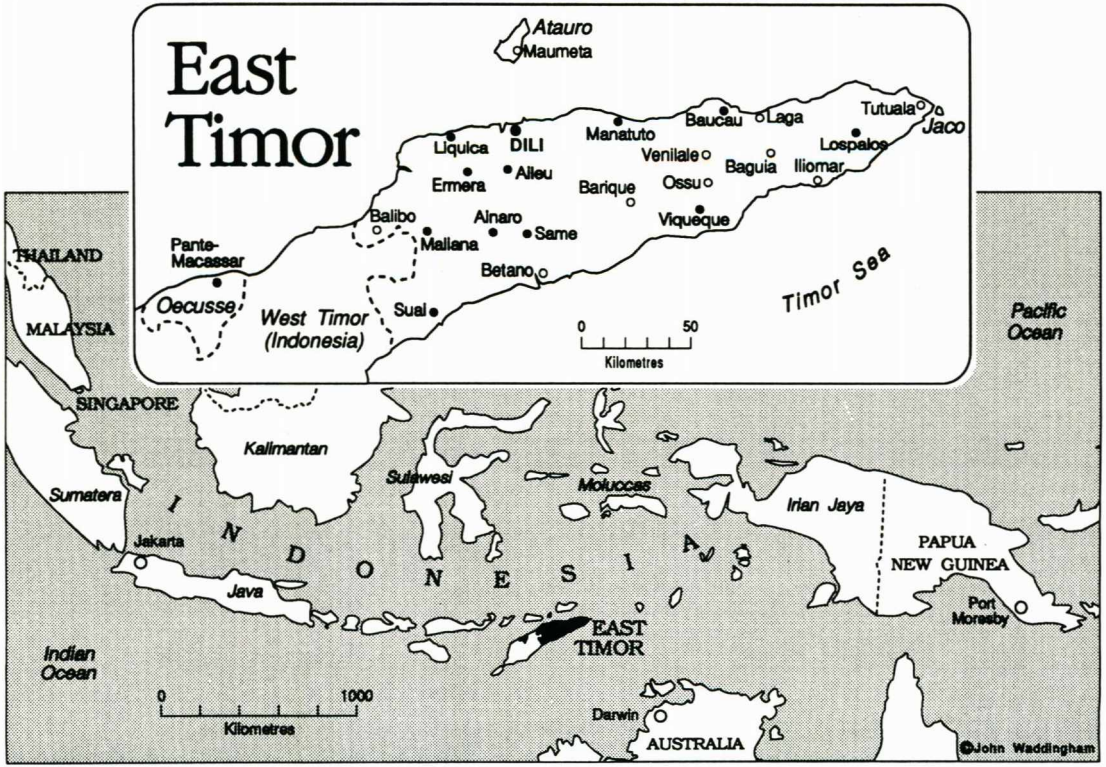
EAST TIMOR

An international responsibility


East Timor
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THAILAND
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SINGAPORE
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Sumatera
Sulawesi
Moluccas
Irian Jaya
Jakarta
I N D O N E S I A
Java
PAPUA NEW GUINEA
Port Moresby
EAST TIMOR
Indian Ocean
Pacific Ocean
0
1000
Kilometres
Darwin
AUSTRALIA
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East Timor

Introduction

East Timor was invaded by Indonesia in December 1975, a few months after Vietnam was re-united and a year after the 'carnation revolution' ended fascism in Portugal. Out of a population of 650,000 Timorese, up to 200,000 have since died due to repression and famine. East Timor is almost entirely isolated from international contact, yet its small nationalist guerrilla movement has continued to defy one of the most powerful armies in the developing world, resisting an occupation that is almost unparalleled for violence and corruption.

International attention briefly focussed on East Timor in October 1989, when the Pope visited Indonesia. At the end of an open-air mass celebrated at Tacitolo, outside the capital Dili, a group of young people protested in favour of independence. In November 1991 it was in the news again, when Indonesian soldiers gunned down about 100 peaceful demonstrators in the Dili cemetery of Santa Cruz. The demonstrators had gathered outside the church where a young man had been killed by security agents a few days earlier. The following week it was reported that witnesses of the massacre at Santa Cruz cemetery had been taken away in lorries and machine-gunned into an open grave on the beach at Tacitolo.

East Timor is the most populous territory still listed by the United Nations as requiring decolonisation. In 1991 the outgoing Secretary General, Sr Perez de Cuellar, declared that it was as important as Namibia, which was decolonised under UN supervision in 1989. He drew similar parallels with the Western Sahara, where, after years of war, the UN is preparing a referendum in 1992 that will

determine whether that territory becomes independent or a part of Morocco. Virtually no government denies that Indonesia's occupation of East Timor is illegal, and most consider that Indonesian rule has been characterised by serious and consistent abuses. This **Comment** examines why, in spite of Indonesia's damning record and growing evidence of the strength of Timorese nationalism, the international community has done so little to support the rights of East Timor's people, and asks whether, after the end of the Cold War, the Timorese have any reason to feel more optimistic about their future.

Background

Timor, one of the southernmost islands of the Indonesian archipelago, lies some 300 miles to the north of Australia. The Western half was under Dutch colonial control from 1653 (with the exception of the enclave of Oecusse), and has belonged to the Republic of Indonesia since the Dutch East Indies was decolonised in 1949. East Timor, the more mountainous half, covers an area of some 7,400 square miles, and includes the enclave of Oecusse and the small island of Atauro opposite Dili, East Timor's principal town and port. East Timor, including Oecusse, was claimed as a colony by Portugal from the mid-17th century. Although Portuguese rule was frequently challenged by the Timorese and the Dutch, colonial occupation was almost unbroken from the middle of the 18th century to 1975.

The Indonesian census of 1980 calculated that East Timor had a population of 550,000. The Portuguese administration estimated in 1974 that the population numbered between 650,000 and 680,000. Apart from a few thousand inhabitants of Chinese, European and mixed ancestry, almost all were of Timorese origin. Since the invasion of 1975, however, over 100,000 Indonesians have migrated to East Timor, and parts of Dili are today almost completely Indonesian in character. 'Bahasa Indonesia', the *lingua franca* of Indonesia, is widely spoken, especially by the younger generation. However, East Timorese prefer to speak Portuguese or Tetum or another of the numerous local languages or dialects.

Before 1975, most East Timorese followed traditional religions. However, partly because they are required by Indonesian law to profess one of five named faiths, large numbers of East Timorese have converted to Roman Catholicism since the invasion. Today the

great majority of the population are Roman Catholic — at least formally.

Colonial history

The first European settlement was established in Timor by Portuguese Dominicans in 1566, and for the next two centuries the Portuguese and Dutch disputed control. West and East Timor were finally separated by an agreement signed by the two colonial powers in 1913. West Timor joined Indonesia on its independence in 1949, whereas no movement towards decolonisation occurred under the fascist Porutguese governments of Salazar (1933 to 1971) and his successor Caetano (1971 to 1974), until the Caetano regime was overthrown by Portuguese officers in the 'carnation revolution' in 1974.

The four centuries of Portuguese rule were a period of neglect. The main economic activities remained subsistence agriculture and hunting. Few roads were built and almost no health or education services existed outside Dili. East Timor was originally prized for its sandalwood, but this is now virtually exhausted. Coffee was introduced in the mid-19th century and became the principal export (80 to 90 per cent of exchange revenue), supplemented by rubber, copra and peanuts. Commerce was largely controlled by Portuguese and Chinese traders. Few industries were established, but towards the end of the colonial period mining companies began to evaluate the prospects for exploiting deposits of copper, gold and manganese. There are extensive fish stocks and significant oil reserves along the southern coast and in the Timor Gap between East Timor and Australia.

Revolts were frequent and put down with difficulty. One continued from the late 1880s until 1912 and was defeated only after the arrival of troopships from Mozambique. Three thousand Timorese were killed. The Japanese occupation of the island during the Second World War was resisted by Australian commandos supported by the Timorese. Some 40,000 Timorese are believed to have died during this period of occupation.

After the war, Portugal once again assumed control. However, the repressive character of its colonial regime attracted mounting international criticism. During the 1960s an educated elite with nationalist aspirations began to emerge, often the product of the Catholic schools and, in particular, of the Daré seminary outside

Dili. Nevertheless, it was not until the Portuguese revolution of 1974 that indigenous political forces could develop freely.

East Timor's main political parties were all formed in May 1974. Only the smallest, the Timorese Popular Democratic Association (APODETI), supported union with Indonesia. Most influential at first was the Timorese Democratic Union (UDT), which favoured federation with Portugal. The Social Democratic Association of Timor (ASDT) — later to become the Revolutionary Front for the Independence of East Timor (Fretilin) — advanced more radical ideas. Its manifesto called for rejection of colonialism and racial discrimination and demanded the right to independence, immediate participation in local government, and a campaign against corruption. Whereas the UDT favoured a substantial role for foreign companies in the development of East Timor's tourism and mining industries, Fretilin advanced a policy of self-reliance and strict economic controls (policies common to many third world economies at this time). The two parties also differed on social policy: Fretilin launched an education programme based on the 'conscientisation' method, and introduced production co-operatives, together with some preliminary measures of land reform.

Both organisations were nevertheless in favour of an orderly, gradual process of decolonisation and, from January to May 1975, the UDT and Fretilin formed a coalition, encouraged by the Portuguese. This was aimed at devising proposals for a transitional government and it agreed on 'total independence, rejection of integration, repudiation of colonialism and recognition of decolonisation'. The coalition's collapse was due far more to Portugal's weak and ambiguous diplomacy over East Timor and to Indonesia's increasingly aggressive tactics than to unbridgeable differences of policy between the two parties.

Indonesian destabilisation and civil war

The formal absorption of East Timor may or may not have been a firm ambition of senior groups in the Indonesian government before the Portuguese revolution of April 1974. Contingency plans for a take-over certainly existed, however, and Indonesia was encouraged towards integration by some Portuguese politicians and by Gough Whitlam, Australia's Prime Minister at the time. He declared his support as early as September 1974, only a few months

after Indonesia's foreign minister had written to assure Fretilin that Indonesia had no claim upon the territory.

From that point Indonesian pressure increased inexorably. Indonesian discussions with Apodeti in September 1974 were backed by broadcasts claiming that Fretilin was 'communist' and the UDT 'neo-fascist' and 'colonialist'. In March 1975 the Indonesian authorities closed West Timor to journalists. Then, in August, having been told by Indonesian intelligence chiefs that Indonesia would intervene if Fretilin gained power, UDT leaders attempted a coup to prevent this. They seized key installations in Dili and Baucau and issued an ultimatum to the Portuguese authorities demanding immediate independence and the imprisonment of certain Fretilin leaders. The Portuguese provincial government rejected the ultimatum but chose not to intervene. Fighting broke out in Dili and spread to the central mountain districts.

Between 1,500 and 2,500 people were killed during the civil war that followed, most of them in the mountain areas. However, East Timorese colonial troops deserted en masse with their arms and equipment to join Fretilin, which already had the support of most of the rural population, and by September 1975 Fretilin was in control of virtually all of Portuguese Timor.

In view of subsequent claims, it should be stressed that Fretilin wanted independence to be achieved over a period of five years, and was opposed to an early declaration of independence. It continued to recognise Portuguese sovereignty and repeatedly called upon the Governor, who had transferred his residence to the island of Atauro during the fighting, to return to Dili and resume the process of decolonisation. Portugal's refusal to do so transformed Fretilin into the *de facto* government, and between September and November 1975 it administered the territory. During this period Fretilin leaders repeatedly declared their willingness to live in harmony with Timor's neighbours in the region, and invited delegations from Indonesia and Australia to visit Dili. Observers in Timor at the time recognised that Fretilin governed responsibly and enjoyed popular support.

The invasion

After Fretilin's victory in the civil war, Indonesian forces mounted increasingly extensive and aggressive operations into East Timor across the border. On 28 November, in a bid to attract outside

diplomatic support as invasion approached, Fretilin leaders declared independence and proclaimed the Democratic Republic of East Timor. On 7 December Indonesia invaded.

Fretilin argues that its unilateral declaration of independence was an act of self-determination, and that its authority over the territory conformed to the United Nation's normal conditions. Portugal's view, on the other hand, is that East Timor has not yet exercised its right to self-determination, and that Portugal has a continuing responsibility to assist the territory to independence. Both these views deny that Indonesia has title to East Timor and reject Indonesia's claim that an administrative vacuum and a breakdown of law and order made its intervention necessary.

Soon after the invasion, Indonesia appointed a 'Timorese People's Assembly'. In May 1976, after meeting for two hours in Dili under military supervision, this body approved a petition for the integration of East Timor into the Indonesian state. Two months later, on 17 July 1976, President Suharto formally declared the incorporation of East Timor as a province of the Republic of Indonesia. This charade has never been internationally recognised. The United Nations considers the Assembly to have been an unrepresentative body acting under duress.

Indonesia has advanced other arguments to justify the invasion: contiguity, the island's historical unity and the claims of regional stability. They are equally specious. Moreover, they are all contradicted by the Suharto government's formal declaration before 1976 that it had no claims on any territory which had not formed part of the Dutch East Indies. The International Court of Justice has ruled that such declarations by a state are binding on its future conduct: in law, therefore, the case against Indonesia is unanswerable.

Occupation

The invasion took the form of a sea and air attack on Dili with bombers, paratroops and marines. It was followed by brutal treatment of the civilian population: there was indiscriminate killing and rape on the streets of Dili, and buildings were sacked and burned. In February 1976, East Timor's Vice-Governor, appointed by Indonesia, admitted that 60,000 Timorese had been killed in the three months following the invasion.

Initially, Indonesian strategy was to break East Timorese resistance by military force alone. Neither Indonesian commanders

nor foreign diplomats expected prolonged resistance. However, in spite of vastly superior resources, after three months the Indonesian armed forces only controlled coastal and border regions and areas accessible from the limited road network. It is believed that the Indonesian army sustained very high losses at this stage of the campaign — as many as 20,000 men according to some military analysts. Indonesia's response was to impose a brutal counter-insurgency policy, relying heavily after 1977 on the ruthless use of air power. Indonesia's acquisition after 1977 of specialist counter-insurgency aircraft was a turning point in the campaign. The most important aircraft were sold by the United States Government: slow-flying Bronco OV10-Fs, F-5s and A-4s, which had all been used extensively in Vietnam. Indonesia also purchased Sabres from Malaysia, Alouette helicopters from France and Hawk trainer-fighters from the United Kingdom. Mountain areas where the civilian population had taken refuge were bombed intensively, preventing the people from supporting themselves through agriculture. The island was completely isolated from international contact (although not from Western intelligence sources, which could pick up Indonesian radio traffic). Famine aggravated the effects of injury, disease and displacement, causing huge casualties. In 1978 and 1979 thousands of East Timorese streamed down from the mountains. Many died of hunger. Experienced relief workers who took part in the restricted relief programme that was subsequently permitted by the Indonesian authorities compared the situation with that in Biafra during the Nigerian civil war of 1967 to 1970.

At this point, the Indonesian authorities believed that Fretilin had been defeated. Almost all the top leadership, including the president, Nicolau Lobato, had been killed or captured. In the east, nevertheless, a handful of guerrillas had survived. Led by José Alexandre Gusmao (more usually referred to by his *nom de guerre* Xanana Gusmao), they regrouped and gradually re-established political contact throughout the territory. From 1980, guerrilla actions recommenced. Operating in smaller units, fighting a classical defensive guerrilla war, the East Timorese resistance movement successfully defied thousands of Indonesian troops deployed against them throughout the 1980s.

Indonesia's military response was variable. Sometimes it preferred a more flexible approach — most notably in 1983 when the military commander met Xanana Gusmao and agreed a

ceasefire. For most of the decade, however, the military authorities applied unyielding repression. Under no restraint from foreign observers, they did not hesitate, in sweeps dubbed 'fence of legs' operations, to drive unarmed civilians in front of advancing troops so that they would be caught in any crossfire. Whole communities were forcibly regrouped in 'strategic villages' under military supervision and under conditions which prevented them from farming their land. Surveillance was intense and, in the absence of legal redress, those suspected of aiding the resistance faced ruthless treatment. Numerous cases of murder, 'disappearance', rape and political imprisonment in all parts of East Timor have been documented by human rights organisations and the local church. As a group of priests wrote to the Pope in May 1983, the people of the territory suffered 'moral and physical violence; arbitrary imprisonment; the resettlement of families and whole villages; the execution of those who surrender; executions without trial or summary judgement; disappearances and the destruction of families; the execution of whole groups of those captured; hunger and disease through all of East Timor'. After 1985, more refugees left the island and many gave detailed descriptions of the traumatic violence of the occupation to Committees of the United Nations and other bodies. Their evidence confirmed other striking features of Indonesian rule in the territory: the extent of corruption; the exclusion of Timorese from many employment opportunities; and the degree to which interests associated with the Indonesian military managed key sectors of the economy, namely, the trade in coffee, the importation of alcohol, and public works and construction.

It is difficult to overstate the totalitarian character of the repression against East Timor's people during this period. In order to destroy the kinship ties upon which the resistance networks relied, thousands of people were displaced. Some were deported to the island of Atauro, others relocated to different areas of East Timor, still others settled in new villages, many of which were built on lowland sites where the population suffered from virulent malaria and other diseases. The new villages were set up away from people's original homes and placed near roads or intersections. They consisted of groups of huts in a fenced-off area with restricted access, and were guarded by troops. The people's huts were erected in the centre of the area and were surrounded by higher grade dwellings inhabited by the military, police and camp administrators.

Movement was severely restricted and the people were subjected to rigorous control. Because they could not farm their land any more, famine became widespread. In short, families and communities were dispersed and the social fabric of East Timor torn apart. Nor did East Timorese have any protection under the law. Surrenderees were frequently executed on the spot, and thousands of detainees disappeared during or after interrogation in the many safehouses located all over the territory. On several occasions, hundreds of civilians were massacred by the military, apparently in cold blood. Except for a short period at the beginning of the 1990s, not a single soldier was reported to have been disciplined for human rights abuses against the population. This record was even maintained after the killings in November 1991 in Santa Cruz cemetery. After this incident, which was filmed and shown round the world, not one soldier or officer was arrested — whereas at least six Timorese demonstrators have been charged with crimes of subversion that carry the death penalty. For nearly a decade, East Timor was a society ruled by military fiat, in which the civilian population could exercise no rights at all. Under intense surveillance, prevented from cultivating their crops and suffering from diseases of poverty and undernourishment, the people of East Timor lived literally in fear of their lives. In addition, for most of the 1980s, communications with the outside world were fragmentary so that people could not even speak about what they had experienced. This improved in 1990 and 1991, and the clandestine front then succeeded in sending out more information on human rights abuses.

In addition to resettling the East Timorese population, the military transmigrated farmers from other parts of Indonesia, particularly Java. It is said that the military hope to resettle some 65 million Javanese to the outer islands by the early 21st century. This serves the joint purpose of diluting the indigenous population and providing cheap labour for military controlled enterprises. The Indonesian transmigrants were frequently given land from which the East Timorese had been driven. This movement of farmers into East Timor is supported by the World Bank and its affiliates as part of Indonesia's overall transmigration programme.

The regime has distorted Indonesian attitudes to the East Timorese in ways that invite comparison with Europe's colonial experience. It is common to hear Indonesian officials say that the East Timorese are in need of civilisation, that their culture is inferior,

that their poverty and passivity are due to laziness or lack of ability. Racist stereotypes are used to justify the imposition of Indonesian culture and authority. By contrast, the people of East Timor appear to have retained and reinforced their sense of national identity, in spite of the fact that almost every dimension of their society was dislocated. Indonesian military documents captured in 1983 revealed that the guerrillas had re-established liaison with the population under Indonesian control in spite of draconian security controls established in every village. The tenacity of Timorese resistance incited the Indonesian authorities to apply policies of ever greater severity — an escalation of military force that eventually approached genocidal proportions, but which had the effect at each stage of hardening popular opposition. The distasteful and barren character of this means of pacification became increasingly evident and finally led the Indonesian authorities to consider alternative strategies. During the later years of the 1980s, those who favoured a less violent form of rule, based on economic incentives, began to prevail. From 1989 the Indonesian government formally adopted new policies.

Out of isolation

Following a visit by President Suharto in November 1988, it was declared that East Timor was to be opened. From 1 January 1989 Indonesians were permitted to visit without special permit, and independent travellers were not prevented from entering the territory. At the same time, the military command declared that the army's priorities would shift from security to development work, in accordance with official Indonesian policy which attributes a 'dual socio-political and military function' (*dwi fungsi*) to the security forces.

These decisions, which remained controversial within the Indonesian government, implied the gradual 'civilianisation' of Indonesian rule and an eventual end to the arbitrary military diktat that had been the principal cause of terror after 1975. For nationalists the new political environment offered an opportunity to adopt more open political tactics, through which they could hope eventually to exercise some civil freedoms and rights. For Indonesian officials the change signified that, in their long battle against East Timorese nationalism, political management was expected to take precedence over military violence.

Urban nationalists responded decisively to this challenge - possibly moving rather faster than the leadership in the mountains. A public demonstration on the occasion of the Pope's visit was covered by newspapers across the world. This was followed by an equally effective demonstration in January 1990, during a visit to Dili by the United States Ambassador, and by another at Dili's new cathedral, after a mass celebrated by the Pro-nuncio from Jakarta. The spontaneous populist bravura of this wave of urban protest, and the youth of those involved, convinced numerous observers and Indonesian officials that Indonesia's pacification policy had failed politically. The germ of nationalism had been successfully transmitted from the mountains to a new generation.

The nationalist movement was itself radically re-organised after 1988. Overall leadership remained in the mountains with Xanana, but Fretilin ceased to be described as the leading force of the resistance. In 1986 Fretilin and the UDT had formed an alliance — titled the Nationalist Convergence — and in 1989 Xanana re-organised the overseas representation and resigned as leader of Fretilin. This decision, which caused considerable confusion when first announced, seems to have been taken to emphasise that the struggle led by Xanana represented the nationalist aspirations of the whole people and not a narrow political tendency. Xanana subsequently agreed to reconsider, but the incident indicated how much the nationalist leadership has felt that it is dealing with a new, more fluid political environment.

In an important interview in September 1990 with Robert Domm — an Australian lawyer who became the first foreign visitor to meet Xanana since 1975 — Xanana admitted that it was increasingly difficult to sustain the guerrilla struggle, because the Indonesian army had become more skilful in counter-insurgency techniques. But he claimed that the nationalist movement was far stronger politically, being well-organised in all parts of the territory and united across party and ideological lines. Xanana said that the nationalist leadership recognised that they could not militarily force Indonesia to leave and no longer assumed that they could expect assistance from the international community. Their struggle would therefore be a long one. By contrast, they were confident of eventual success because they believed that popular resistance to Indonesia was deeply-rooted.

The evidence suggests that the armed struggle in the mountains has become less significant as an index of Timorese resistance. It is not known how many guerrillas are under arms. Official Indonesian estimates have varied from a few hundred to up to two thousand. Reports suggest that the Indonesian army has greatly improved its military effectiveness as a counter-guerrilla force, inhibiting the guerrillas' ability to operate in large groups or undertake offensive operations. At the same time, the guerrillas have survived and continue to force the Indonesian army to deploy up to 20,000 troops in the territory. The popularity and remarkable technical skills of the guerrillas have been witnessed by recent visitors such as Robert Domm and the journalist Max Stahl. Since 1989 the number of guerrilla attacks has fallen. The crucial question is whether this change reflects a decline in support for the resistance movement or whether, as Xanana claimed to Robert Domm, the leadership is restricting the guerrilla army to a sustainable size while its main priority is long-term political organisation.

The fall in the number of attacks by the guerrillas in the early 1990s may also be explained by a deliberate hold on actions while the resistance prepared to welcome the Portuguese parliamentary delegation expected in October and November 1991. In 1989 Xanana Gusmao had ordered the guerrillas to refrain from offensive action to stabilise the situation, and the delegation became the central focus of their planning. For months activists in the clandestine resistance prepared banners and papers and prepared for a demonstration. The disappointment engendred by the cancellation of the visit cannot be underestimated. The people felt that they would die for nothing.

The task facing the Indonesian authorities was revealed clearly by an academic report, published in 1990, which was commissioned from the Indonesian University of Gadja Madah, in Yogyabarta, by the Bank of Indonesia and the Provincial Government of East Timor. Based upon sociological fieldwork, and guiltless of sympathy towards East Timorese nationalism, the report confirmed that the East Timorese were deeply alienated from Indonesian rule. In explaining this alienation, it drew attention to the prevalence of abuse, violence and corruption and concluded that the economic passivity and 'backwardness' of the East Timorese resulted primarily from this political alienation and would not be solved by economic subsidies.

This conclusion was significant because, during the second half

of the 1980s, the Indonesian government spent large sums of money developing East Timor's administrative and economic infrastructure. For much of the decade, East Timor received the highest per capita budget allocation in Indonesia; indeed, it was so large that the local economy was unable to absorb it. Numerous administrative buildings were constructed; roads were improved; many schools and clinics were built. The Gadja Mada report was commissioned at least partly because of the government's concern that its funds were having no discernible developmental effect. The Timorese remained poor and marginalised, and most of the economic benefits were being taken up by immigrants.

The dilemma before the Indonesian authorities is simply described. They have failed to eradicate nationalism by repression, and further repression is likely to entrench alienation — and, additionally, to inhibit the international community from accepting East Timor's integration within Indonesia. Equally, they have failed to appease the East Timorese with material incentives. If the authorities attempt to introduce a less oppressive system of government, it will become easier for the nationalist opposition to organise politically and, in addition, it will become difficult to prevent East Timorese from reporting what happened during the most terrible years of repression. This could have explosive political consequences in Indonesia, as well as East Timor and abroad, since those responsible for the violence, the torture and the repression still occupy senior positions in many levels of Indonesian society.

The difficulty is compounded by the fact that East Timor's nationalist movement does not appear to be confined to particular sectors of the society. It is a popular movement which also attracts a high proportion of East Timor's small professional and economic middle class. To suppress the urban nationalist movement it would probably be necessary to arrest most of the Timorese elite — which would immediately discredit the Indonesian government's claim to have won over the Timorese and fully pacified the territory.

Although Indonesia's military control has become more assured, the decision to 'open' East Timor paradoxically created a political environment in which its political authority became more vulnerable, because more subject to public exposure. In effect, Indonesian officials have had to begin to learn how to manage a society in which the majority is not only alienated from Indonesian rule but is likely to support the nationalist aspiration to

independence for years to come. Moreover, unlike most other parts of Indonesia, the nationalist movement is sharply motivated and well-organised. It is a situation in which arbitrary terror no longer pervades everyday life but where the memory and the threat of violence remain. It obliges most Timorese to practise political duplicity as a matter of course and it encourages detailed and invasive surveillance. After the territory was 'opened', in short, a murderous military conflict was superseded by a political conflict that is almost as dangerous for those who are politically active, but which is almost invisible to the casual view. The Indonesian authorities, fully aware of Timorese attitudes, believe that in the long term they can co-opt Timorese nationalism into submission; whereas the nationalists believe that they can play the same game longer and emerge in the end with a stronger hand. Beneath the everyday political negotiations is the ever-present threat of violence. Used when it is useful for effect or when the political management fails, it continues to cause the deaths of dozens of Timorese, as well as Indonesian soldiers, every year. And these are on top of well-publicised massacres such as Santa Cruz.

Following the cold-blooded massacre in Santa Cruz cemetery in November 1991, it must be asked whether the Indonesian military has reverted to a policy of pure repression. It is too soon to say. Politically, it is difficult to understand why the killing was organised at a time and in a place that would ensure it was reported: the event was in fact witnessed by several accredited western journalists and filmed by a professional cameraman. The worst abuses of human rights in East Timor have usually occurred outside Dili, in rural areas where no-one is likely to record or observe them. This suggests either that Indonesia's political management had broken down because of the exceptional tensions generated by the planned UN and Portuguese Parliamentary visit; or that the massacre was not so much designed to terrify the Timorese as to influence Indonesia's political leaders. It is true that hardliners are still influential within the military, which remains the most powerful political institution within Indonesia. Nonetheless, it is more likely that the Indonesian Government will attempt to re-establish its fragile and compromised 'open' policy in East Timor, than recreate the nightmare of isolation and military violence of the first decade of Indonesian occupation.

The Catholic church

In this situation the Catholic church has played, and will continue to play, a central role. It was summed up in the Gadjah Madah report, whose authors explain why the population is alienated from the government and recommend that the government and the army and the Catholic church work together, because the government and the army have the money and power but only the Church enjoys the confidence and loyalty of the people.

The Catholic church has a strong presence in East Timor. In 1974 church authorities estimated the Catholic population at almost 200,000, or about one third of the total population. The church's influence, however, extended far beyond the ranks of its members. Its network of mission stations brought it into wide contact with the people, and it ran most of the schools. Reflecting its Portuguese background, the church's social attitudes were conservative, yet the Jesuit seminary trained a high proportion of the territory's educated elite, including many leaders of the nationalist movement.

The Indonesian invasion and occupation proved to be a period of trial from which the church emerged strengthened. The invasion broke its links with the colonial regime — the last Portuguese bishop departed with the governor and his staff -and obliged priests and religious to choose whether they stayed with the people or accepted the invader. Though there were Catholics with varying degrees of sympathy for the Indonesian presence, in general the Timorese church 'stayed with the people', in many cases literally, as priests fled with their parishioners into the mountains to escape Indonesian troops and bombing raids. No doubt marked by the extreme suffering of ordinary people during the first years of the Indonesian occupation, the Timorese clergy, largely unaided from outside, developed their own theology and spirituality of resistance. It emphasised national identity and culture, human rights and justice, and defined the church itself in terms of service to the people.

Since then, the church has played an important role in holding society together. In this, the diocese benefited from the unusual and privileged relationship with Rome that it enjoyed following the invasion. East Timor being the subject of an international dispute, the Vatican did not attach the diocese to the Bishops' Conference of Indonesia or Portugal but administered the diocese itself. In practise this meant that between 1975 and 1989 the Catholic church

was the only institution in East Timor that communicated independently with the outside world, maintaining institutional connections with an international structure. It could therefore guard for itself a certain independence from the Indonesian authorities.

During the 1980s the Catholic church was able, to a far greater extent than other Timorese institutions (with the possible exception of the resistance movement), to defend threatened individuals and threatened values. The first Apostolic Administrator, Mgr da Costa Lopes, won great popular respect for his attempts to protect individuals from abusive treatment and his trenchant condemnation of corruption and human rights violations. Under pressure from the Indonesian military, the Vatican was probably embarrassed by da Costa Lopes' vocal support for the Timorese people. He was removed in 1983. His successor, Bishop Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo, was expected to play a more conciliatory role. However, he took up where da Costa Lopes had left off, despite being put under enormous pressure by the authorities, who were embarrassed by the international and local publicity that the church's criticisms attracted.

The church has been for the East Timorese a source of spiritual solace in a society that has suffered a profound trauma. In addition, in a world overturned by war, it represents an important element of continuity. Rarer still, it has offered a cultural and public space not occupied by the Indonesian authorities. It is striking that many of the public protests in recent months have been associated with religious events.

In these circumstances, it is unsurprising that the great majority of Timorese opted for Catholicism when they were required to adopt a religion recognised by the Indonesian laws of *Pancasila.* In the space of a few years, the proportion of nominal Catholics rose from 30 per cent to more than 80 per cent. This growth meant that the church could reasonably claim to represent the views of a majority of East Timor's people. At the same time, it imposed huge new demands on the diocese and on church personnel. By the end of the 1980s, when East Timor was 'opened', the church had already transformed its institutional structures.

From the early 1980s, when it became apparent that the church was growing faster than local clergy could be trained, Mgr da Costa Lopes and then Mgr Belo invited priests and other church personnel from outside East Timor to help fill the gap. Three groups, almost

equal in number, can now be distinguished: the East Timorese clergy, most of whom are diocesan priests working in parishes west and south of Dili; Indonesian clergy and religious; and foreign missionaries and religious. In this way, some of the political tensions within East Timorese society have been imported into the church. This division is clearest over the question of self-determination, since the great majority of East Timorese support it, while most Indonesian clergy accept the Indonesian Government's view that the matter of East Timor's integration within Indonesia has been settled.

In the judgement of the local authorities, the Catholic church is simultaneously one of the principal obstacles to achieving full pacification, and a vital player in the government's political strategy to achieve it. Its integration policy relies increasingly upon economic incentives and the effective delivery of government services. Since the church is unquestionably the institution that can most effectively persuade the public to accept government services in health, education and other areas, large benefits have been offered to secure its goodwill. The new Cathedral in Dili, one of the largest in Asia, was partly funded by gifts from the military budget and from central government. For accepting such offers, church leaders have been criticised for losing sight of their principles. However, forms of compromise are inescapable in the context of East Timor, and church leaders are acutely aware of the pressures that the authorities can bring to bear against those who publicly show signs of independent thought.

The record of the East Timorese church reflects its composition, its long history of isolation, and its subordinate status — overshadowed by the Indonesian church and under the direction of the Vatican. Rome has always held that nothing should be done to undermine good relations between the Indonesian government and the Indonesian Catholic church, through fear that there might be a Muslim backlash in Indonesia. This, combined with the fact that the Indonesian churches generally support integration, has tended to paralyse church initiatives on this question.

In fact, Pope John Paul II has expressed his concern about East Timor on several occasions, most notably by deciding to celebrate mass there during his visit to Indonesia in 1989. In 1984, when accepting the credentials of the Indonesian Ambassador to the Holy See, he declared: 'The Holy See continued to follow the situation

in East Timor with pre-occupation and with the hope that particular consideration will be given in every circumstance to the ethnic, religious and cultural identity of the people'. Emphasising the need to safeguard human rights, he went on to say that it was 'the ardent wish of the Holy See that all rights of individuals be respected and that every effort be made to lighten the sufferings of the people by facilitating the work of relief organisations and by ensuring the access of humanitarian aid to those in need'. Concern has been expressed by numerous institutions and bodies within the churches — including the Portuguese, Indonesian, Dutch and Japanese bishops' conference — while Pax Romana, Pax Christi, CIIR and other organisations in the churches have testified on behalf of East Timor before the Committees of the United Nations.

International responsibility

The invasion provoked widespread international protest. After a full debate on 11 December 1975, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution, re-affirmed annually until 1982, which called upon Indonesia to withdraw and recognised the right of East Timor's people to self-determination. The 1975 resolution was adopted by 69 votes to 11, with 38 countries abstaining, among them Britain, France, the United States and (West) Germany. Two Security Council Resolutions, on 22 December 1975 and 22 April 1976, also called on Indonesia to withdraw.

Subsequently, however, little was done to effect these resolutions, which still stand and have re-acquired a certain significance in the aftermath of the 1991 war against Iraq. Portugal, which has supported East Timor's claim very energetically since 1985, bears some blame for this. Recognised by the United Nations as the administering power in East Timor at the time of the invasion, and therefore the government with responsibility to represent East Timor's people, Portugal is bound to play a crucial role in any settlement. Although its diplomacy was understandably in confusion after the revolution of 1974, Lisbon remained inexcusably passive through the worst years of the repression. Furthermore, during a critical period of negotiations during 1974 and 1975 some senior officials and politicians virtually acquiesced in the Indonesian takeover. In the early 1980s, however, President Ramalho Eanes took the issue up again, and the current Social Democrat government of Mr Cavaco Silva, supported by the Socialist President

Mr Soares, has campaigned energetically in international fora. In an important recent development, the Portuguese Government took Australia before the International Court of Justice for signing contracts with Indonesia to exploit oil reserves between East Timor and Australia.

Portugal can bring little direct pressure to bear on Indonesia, however, and can certainly not force Indonesia to leave East Timor. Its ability to secure a settlement depends upon the readiness of other governments to offer international backing. It is here that Portugal's European allies and the United States and Japan, which have active and friendly relations with Indonesia, might play a constructive role.

The European Community relates to Indonesia bilaterally and through the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), of which Indonesia is a member. Many countries in the EC, including Britain, with Australia, the US, New Zealand and Japan, were also members of the Inter-Governmental Group on Indonesia (IGGI), which granted large sums in aid every year until its dissolution by the Indonesian government in March 1992. All these countries now belong to the new consultative group on Indonesia which has been formed under the auspices of the World Bank, and are in a position to argue that the principles of territorial integrity that they defended in Kuwait should be defended in East Timor.

It is not true that the industrial powers have done nothing on behalf of East Timor's people; it is true that they have been culpably ineffective. On several occasions, the EC has expressed concern about human rights, and senior politicians routinely raise human rights cases with their Indonesian counterparts. In doing so, they afford some protection to individuals at risk. However, in only doing so, they knowingly address the symptoms of the problem, while ignoring its cause — which stems directly from Indonesia's illegal occupation and the refusal of East Timor's people to accept it.

Similarly, governments of the European Community should be praised for taking the view since 1975 that the Indonesian invasion was illegal (implying that Indonesia is not in law the legitimate government of East Timor), and that the people of East Timor have not exercised their right to self-determination and should be allowed to do so. However, by failing to take effective action in support of these views, and by abstaining from voting in favour of East Timor during debates at the United Nations General Assembly, EC governments have undermined the force of international law and

have encouraged Indonesia (and other authoritarian governments) to believe that it can breach international law with impunity. The European Community should accept that it is partly responsible for the prolonged suffering of East Timor's people. EC governments proclaim a belief in the UN Charter, human rights, democracy and the rule of law. They should therefore act in support of these principles rather than hoping that the Timorese people, because they are powerless, will eventually accommodate themselves to an injustice.

At present the European Community, potentially a powerful influence on Indonesian policy, can justifiably be accused of subordinating fundamental principles of international law to its economic and strategic interests in Indonesia. Neither the Timorese nor the Government of Portugal have asked the European Community to go to war for East Timor as they went to war for Kuwait. Nevertheless, the principles involved are comparable and it is reasonable to expect the European Community to be publicly resolute in its diplomacy on the issue. The EC should affirm that Indonesia is in breach of international law, should vote in favour of resolutions that support Indonesian withdrawal, and should positively promote a negotiated settlement and self-determination for the people of East Timor. Only if European governments pursue these approaches more vigorously will they be regarded as taking the matter — and the principles concerned — seriously. Their present and on-going arms sales and aid tranfers simply undermine their words. The British government, for example, has been a major arms supplier to Indonesia since 1978. Sales have included tribal class navy frigates, Hawk trainer/strike aircraft, Rapier air defence missiles, Seawolf missile launchers, Saladin, Saracen and Ferret armoured cars, land-rovers, as well as training to Indonesian military personnel. These sales have continued in spite of the most recent atrocities recorded in East Timor. A British supply ship, *Green Rover*, was sold for £11m to the Indonesian Government as recently as February 1992.

The United States, Australia and Japan

Three countries with more direct influence on Indonesian policy are Australia, the United States and Japan. All three have a worse record than the European Community with respect to East Timor.

Australia, East Timor's closest neighbour, is in a unique position to influence events in the territory. Australian foreign policy has

been dominated, however, by the assumption that relations with Indonesia are vital to Australia's long-term strategic and political interests. As a result, East Timor has consistently been subordinated to Australia's desire to maintain a good relationship with Indonesia. Apart from an initial hostile vote in the United Nations, successive Australian governments have voted with Indonesia. In 1979 Australia recognised Indonesia's incorporation of East Timor, and this was officially confirmed by Bob Hawke's Labour Government in August 1985. Australia went further than any other government towards legitimising Indonesian rule by agreeing to permit oil prospecting and development between East Timor and Australia — an area of sea bed that belongs in law to Portugal as the Administering Power recognised by the United Nations. The Portuguese government has laid charges against Australia before the International Court of Justice. Although the Australian government has been generous in accepting many Timorese refugees — so that the largest Timorese community is now in Australia — its opportunistic political position is unlikely to change in the short term. This is likely to remain a significant obstacle to achieving a just political settlement that will bring peace to East Timor.

Since 1975 the United States Government has also supported Indonesia over East Timor, though there has been a rising groundswell of concern among Democratic and Republican members of Congress and the Senate. In addition to being a valuable source of raw materials, Indonesia was vital to American strategy during the Cold War because, straddling the Indian and Pacific Oceans, it controls sea passage between the Eastern and Western ports of the USSR and between Japan and the Middle East and Europe. East Timor was itself critical in this regard, because one of the few deep-water passages for nuclear submarines passes to the north of the island through the Ombai-Wettar straits. During the 1970s the United States regarded Indonesia as one of its safest allies, under the authoritarian government of President Suharto, which had risen to power in 1965 through an anti-communist purge that caused the deaths of over a million Indonesians. This was a period when US officials believed that the war in Indochina threatened their strategic control of South-East Asia. The Indonesian invasion of East Timor occurred a few months after the reunification of Vietnam and the victory of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, and followed immediately upon a visit by President Ford and Secretary of State

Kissinger to Jakarta. From the East Timorese point of view, the timing could scarcely have been less favourable. Congressional hearings in 1977 and 1978 made it clear that the US Government had been aware of the impending invasion of 1975. The following year, US military aid to Indonesia was actually increased, and sales of counter-insurgency weaponry such as the slow-flying 'Bronco' bomber and the Northrop 75E Combat jet proved vital to Indonesia's successes against Fretilin in 1978 and 1979.

Japan is Indonesia's largest trading partner, and the largest bilateral contributor to the annual aid package agreed by the Inter-Governmental Group on Indonesia. It is in a position to exert exceptional leverage. Although the Japanese government has consistently refused to allow its trade and investment policies to be influenced by human rights considerations, an increasing number of Japanese politicians have become concerned about the abuses in East Timor. It is possible that in Tokyo and Washington the end of the Cold War will cause the issue of East Timor to be reviewed — on the grounds that the conflict is not provoked by communist revolutionaries, but is a local nationalist movement whose success reflects the illegitimacy of Indonesian rule.

The UN initiative

Following the invasion, most member countries in the United Nations supported Indonesian withdrawal and East Timorese self-determination. Led by Portuguese-speaking countries, resolutions before the UN General Assembly won a majority every year until 1982. The abstention of the major powers and energetic Indonesian lobbying in the developing world nevertheless caused voting support for East Timor to decline steadily, and in 1982 there was a majority of only four votes in favour of a relatively weak resolution against Indonesia at the UN General Assembly. In that year, the United Nations Secretary General, then Mr Perez de Cuellar, was asked 'to initiate consultations with all parties directly concerned, with a view to exploring avenues for achieving a comprehensive settlement of the problem'. Direct talks between Portugal and Indonesia were held officially for the first time at the end of 1984, under the good offices of the UN Secretary General, and have continued since.

From the beginning it was recognised that discussions would be slow, and that no consensus existed between Portugal and

Indonesia for dealing with the fundamental questions of sovereignty and self-determination. Whereas Portugal holds that East Timor must still be decolonised, a process requiring an act of self-determination by the Timorese, Indonesia holds that East Timor, by a patently fraudulent act of self-determination in 1976, has already completed its passage from Portuguese colony to Indonesian province. Although Portugal has a strong case in law, it lacks strong international support and has little effective leverage on Jakarta. Indonesia, by contrast, has all the negotiating advantages of the government 'in possession'.

A further difficulty, which weakens the credibility of the UN Secretary General's initiative, is that no Timorese political organisations, including Fretilin, are recognised by the United Nations — unlike, for example, The South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO), the Saharawis of Western Sahara and the African National Congress (ANC), which have been recognised as representative liberation movements. The Timorese have been indirectly represented by Portugal, because Indonesia has refused to allow Timorese to be involved. Yet it is clearly unreasonable to suppose that a just and acceptable settlement will be reached without consulting the Timorese people. Furthermore, it is a diplomatic construct to say that the Secretary General has brought together 'all parties directly concerned' if the Timorese themselves are absent.

In 1984 and 1985 some bilateral issues were nevertheless resolved in the United Nations: a number of refugees were permitted to leave East Timor under a programme supported by the International Committee of the Red Cross; and several hundred Portuguese civil servants were repatriated.

Since 1989, the question of a Portuguese parliamentary delegation to East Timor has been virtually the only issue of substance being discussed by the Indonesian and Portuguese delegations. For this reason it became an extremely significant issue during 1990 and 1991. The invitation, issued by the chairman of the Indonesian Parliament, was accepted by the Portuguese Parliament and the terms and conditions of the visit were ponderously negotiated by the two governments on behalf of their parliaments. The arrangement was diplomatically convenient in that both governments were involved with, but could dissociate themselves from, a visit that would profoundly test their negotiating positions. As it became obvious that many Timorese had inordinately high

expectations of the first official Portuguese and UN visit since 1975, fears were expressed on all sides that the situation in East Timor might become unmanageable. Nevertheless, by mid-1991 a detailed document had been drafted. The two governments agreed that the Portuguese delegation would make a 'fact-finding' visit (rather than an investigation); would travel freely within East Timor; would be accompanied by UN officials; and would not be required to seek visas from Indonesia, but would pass through Jakarta en route. They also agreed that Portugal and Indonesia would each select an equal number of journalists to report on the delegation's findings.

In October 1991, shortly before the delegation was scheduled to leave, the Indonesian government objected to one of the international journalists on Portugal's press list. The journalist concerned, Jill Jolliffe, was President of the Foreign Press Association in Portugal and an acknowledged expert on East Timor. Considering Indonesia to be in breach of the agreed contract, Portugal refused to change its list. The visit was indefinately postponed. On 12 November the Santa Cruz massacre took place outside a church in Dili: soldiers gunned down unarmed demonstrators at the funeral of a young man killed a few days earlier by security officials. A senior UN Official and special Rapporteur on Torture, Mr Peter Kooijmans, was in Dili at the time of the massacre, further complicating matters for Jakarta.

After protests by the US and European governments, the Indonesian government announced that there would be an official inquiry. Even as it did so, new reports emerged that witnesses to the cemetery massacre had themselves been murdered and buried at Tacitolu and other notorious killing grounds on the outskirts of Dili.

The future

The Santa Cruz demonstration and killings highlighted the political impasse that has been increasingly apparent to visitors since the territory was 'opened' in 1989. Alone, the East Timorese cannot expel Indonesia; their goal of creating an independent society is not realizable because the present Indonesian government will be unwilling to surrender its illegal prize. However, the options facing Indonesian officials and military leaders are also poor, for their brutality and venality has lost them the trust and confidence of the East Timorese for at least two more generations. Those who died at Santa Cruz and those who demonstrated in front of the Pope and

the American Ambassador are young: they are likely to remember their ill-treatment in the same way that their elders remember the deaths of their own parents and children in the mountains after 1975.

The Timorese nationalist movement has achieved the extraordinary feat of conducting a guerrilla war without allies or safe frontiers for over 15 years, against active and ruthless repression. It now has to train a new generation in the skills of peaceful resistance. While the Timorese wait for the opportunity to force political negotiation, they will have to learn how to educate and raise the living standards of their people in competition with incomers from Indonesia.

The Indonesian government faces the indefinite continuation of peaceful protest, supported by large sections of the population and supplemented by guerrilla warfare, which it will be able to conceal only through violent repression and unacceptable forms of social control. This is a consistent pattern which was repeated again before the aborted visit by Portuguese parliamentarians, when thousands of troops were reported to have been deployed around the countryside, numerous activists were harassed or arrested, and the population was warned that severe penalties awaited those who criticised Indonesia in front of the delegation. It is true that spending on infrastructural development may provide work for immigrants from other islands in Indonesia; but, as the Gadjah Mada report showed, it is unlikely to neutralise political resistance among the Timorese. As senior Indonesian and Timorese officials — and Western diplomats — are aware, this is a political problem that will only be resolved by a political solution.

Has the publicity that surrounded the murders in Santa Cruz cemetery brought a political solution any nearer? This is now the most tantalising question facing the Timorese leadership and the Indonesian government, for there is some evidence that a sudden and potentially critical change has occurred within Indonesia and in diplomatic circles. Within Indonesia, the massacre shocked many people and confirmed their growing disquiet about the war in East Timor. This within a society that will face fundamental political changes as the economy develops and the Suharto era, with its autocratic style of government, comes to an end. For most of the last 16 years East Timor has been almost invisible within Indonesia. It is now doubtful that it can be ignored in the same way, because it raises many profound questions about the character of Indonesian

society, its intolerance of rights, its definition of development, and the inequity of relations between the 'inner' and 'outer' islands.

Diplomats in Jakarta, and even senior military figures, are openly speculating about independence for East Timor in a few years. Non-governmental organisations publicly expressed concern after the Santa Cruz killings. These are entirely new developments, with very considerable implications. Even the independent report into the Santa Cruz massacre, which was commissioned by the government, presented conclusions that formally disputed the version of events presented by General Sutrisno, head of the Armed Forces. This was due partly to the pressure exerted on Indonesia by international opinion. Although a number of Northern governments siezed upon the report of the Commission of Inquiry to argue that Indonesia had responded positively to the massacre, there is little doubt that the incontrovertible evidence of organised, cold-blooded killing, combined with the evidence of organised and determined political resistance within East Timor, has severely weakened the credibility of those who have argued that the issue of East Timor has disappeared or will disappear in a few years. The incident also gave credence to the many allegations of abuse and resistance that were made during the 1980s. Certainly no northern government has yet altered its official position on East Timor, but, given also the profound changes that have followed the end of the Cold War (including changes in the status and definition of nations), they may increasingly be forced to reconsider East Timor's claims to belong in the same categories as the Baltic and Yugoslavian states, Eritrea and the Western Sahara. The prospects of instability within Indonesia, which until now have caused Northern governments to suppress action on East Timor, may, in this new context, encourage the opposite policy. There is growing pressure for a halt to arms sales to the Indonesian Government. In Britain there is a new accent on linking aid to democracy, good governance and human rights. In November 1991, British Overseas Aid minister Lynda Chalker confirmed that this applies to Indonesia as well as other recipients of western aid.

'Despite all forces against us,' Mgr Belo wrote to a European church organisation in December 1984, 'we continue to hold and disseminate that the only solution to the East Timor conflict is a political and diplomatic one, and this solution should include, above all, the respect of the right of a people for self-determination. We

also want ... respect for the cultural ethnic and religious identity of the people of East Timor... put into practice. As long as this is not implemented, there will not be a peaceful solution for East Timor.' The Catholic church has consistently argued that the people of East Timor must be permitted to express themselves freely. In another letter, written in 1989 to Sr Perez de Cuellar at the United Nations, Mgr Belo repeated his call for a referendum, saying: 'The people of Timor must be allowed to express their views on their future through a plebiscite. Hitherto, the people have not been consulted. Others speak in the name of the people. Indonesia says that the people of East Timor have already chosen integration, but the people of East Timor themselves have never said this. Portugal wants time to solve the problem. And we continue to die as a people and as a nation.'

Only a disinterested and considered intervention by the international community can curtail this tragic and unnecessary conflict. The United Nations is the most appropriate forum through which this might be achieved. To succeed, a settlement must recognise Indonesia's legitimate security concerns. Above all, however, it must ensure that international law and democratic and human rights are affirmed. As a first step towards this, the silenced and defenceless — but unmistakably defiant — people of East Timor must be allowed to say freely what they have lived through, and to choose the form of government under which they will live. This is the minimum condition under which peace might be achieved. It should be the lowest objective set by the international community.

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Further reading

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John Taylor, *Indonesia's Forgotten War: The Hidden History of East Timor*, Pluto/Zed 1991.

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East Timor was invaded by Indonesia in December 1975. An occupation almost unparalleled in brutality has since wiped out nearly a third of the population — up to 200,000 East Timorese have died due to repression and famine. Yet East Timor's people and the small nationalist guerrilla movement continue to assert their right to self-determination, defying one of the most powerful armies in the developing world.

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